New Fiction

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of characters in each division. Young Arthur believes in progress and sees prospects of a fortune for himself in the "trade" of banking. Ovington takes him into partnership, and all goes well for a time. But naturally the autocratic old Squire is enraged, shocked at the idea of any of his family in dirty business. The plot is built up around a pretty love story and the progressive degeneration of the ambitious young Arthur; there is far too much of it to permit a summary. Mr. Weyman indulges in no tricks; it is a game played with the cards on the table. One knows what is coming and can foresee how the various characters must turn out. The interest lies in following their orderly, inevitable development—the display and interaction of the primal human emotions, love, ambition, greed, anger, stubbornness and devotion to honor. It is a widely ranging, comprehensive picture of life.

The outstanding figure is really that of the old Squire: the fine, stiff necked, irascible, honorable, narrow but dignified old potentate, who is bent but left unbroken by calamity. Possibly young Arthur and the titular hero, young Clement Ovington, are somewhat conventional figures, but they are admirably done. So, also, is old Ovington, the aspiring middle class man with a vision of great things. It is a far ery from the Weyman of the "Gentleman of France" and "The House of the Wolf" to this more mature incarnation, but he has kept the life and movement of his earlier manner in sufficient vigor and has added depths and breadth to his conceptions. It makes a very fine story.

HENRY WALKER.

THE HOUSE THAT DIED. By Henri Bordeaux. Translated by Harold Harper. Duffield and Company.

IT is an excellent thing to have a good English version of such substantial work as that of Henri Bordeaux, especially as the average English reader is apt to think that all modern French fiction is freakish, or somehow "decadent," since there has been more translation of the exaggerated, mannered, or sensational output than of the more solidly conceived novels. M. Bordeaux is strongly individual: he has originality in his approach, but he is no innovator, no freak. He belongs rather to the more ancient tradition and does not expend all his energy on trying to be clever. It has been well said that if his novels were better known in America "our knowledge of French life would be sounder." To judge French current literature by its extravagances would be like judging all American fiction by the writings of Ben Hecht or Waldo Frank.

This story, "La Maison Morte," is a modern version of the theme of Hamlet—frankly so, as M. Bordeaux takes his text from the situation of the play. But instead of one bewildered, hesitant Prince, driven toward revenge, but also held back by his inhibitions, in the novel there are three, and there is added the expiation and remorse of the criminal himself. It is beautifully worked out, with a cumulative effect that is highly impressive. The story is dated within the last twenty years, in the hills of Savoy, at the edge of Italy—the Maurienne. The actors are typical peasants of that peculiar land; not unimaginative like most peasants, and with a flavor of their own. The old house, built of stone some three hundred years ago, is itself almost a personality in the tale. At the opening we see the patriarch, Jean-Pierre Couvert, his wife, and his two sons, Claude and Benoit, and Claude's Italian wife living together in the old house, wherein the farm animals are also stabled. Claude is murdered by his older brother Benoit, who has been carrying on an intrigue with Claude's wife, and, one after another, the others learn the truth. Their first impulse is revenge, punishment, but then comes the inhibition, for it is the son and brother who is guilty. Old Jean-Pierre solves his part of the problem by retiring to a monastery as a lay brother, and the others find similar solutions.

But such a bare outline does no justice to the quality of the novel, which depends for its values upon the emotions of each character as he or she is enlightened. One must follow it in detail to get the effect.

DITTE: TOWARD THE STARS. By Martin Anderson Nexo. Henry Holt & Co.

COMPASSIONATE readers who have followed poor Ditte through the two earlier volumes of her troubles, starting as "Girl Alive" some years ago, will be relieved to know that at the end of this installment she is out of her earthly miseries at last, safely dead and headed "toward the stars." It was a hard journey but, *Sic itur ad astra.* The Scandinavian takes his gloom gloatingly and, naturally, Nexo kills off his victim with high efficiency. Like its earlier installments this is a powerfully moving, poignantly emotional record, but, as a whole, the thing is so unrelieved that it becomes painful, and one is forced to question whether that sort of thoroughgoing "realism" is after all a truthful picture of life.

"Winter," says the opening sentence of this book, "is an evil time for all little creatures; but for the poor man it is like a hell which must be suffered twice—in anticipation first, then he must go through it." There had already been more than anticipation in this record, especially in the horrors of its second volume, but this carries out the promise of a hard winter. It is a series of harrowing episodes in the life of the submerged folk—with side lights on politics, socialism, crime and assorted miseries. Nexo is a master story teller; his narrative moves and it is always grimly alive. Nor is there anything conventional about his gutter creatures; each is a clearly differentiated human atom, broken and trodden down into the muck of things. "Ditte could not get the hang of the whole affair. . . . There was too much to fight against from day to day for one to begin to speculate about the future: sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." That is the text of the whole; except that the evil more than suffices.

But one must admit that Nexo is an artist; perhaps even a great artist in his narrow field—an *art Macabre* that must probably remain exotic to the English mind. The translation is by Asta and Rowland Kenney, and is very well done.

"BRING ME HIS EARS." By Clarence E. Mulford. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co.

ASIDE from its singularly engaging title this is pretty much the usual thing in semi-historical, wild West adventuring. It dates about 1840 and is full of trappers, Indians, early editions of gunmen, and "Greasers." The Mexican Governor of New Mexico is so ill-advised as to demand the body of one Tom Boyd or failing that he instructs his emissary to "Bring me his ears," of course killing him first. It was much too large a contract, even for a syndicate of hard characters. There is plenty of good fighting, ambushes, hand to hand struggles, and a general sprinkling of gore. It is a good "thriller."

THE GOOSE MAN. By J. Wassermann. Translated by Allen W. Porterfield. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

WHEN German Kultur was at its real height, a century or so ago, when the ruling cult in literature was that of sentimentality and sausages, it must be admitted that though the sentiment was often beautiful and the sausages, beyond question, of the very best, the thing was carried somewhat to excess. The German lacks moderation in his enthusiasms. Now that the prevailing taste tends toward sin and sordidness it is not surprising to find indulgence therein excessive—inordinate. Of these modern apostles of literary frightfulness Wassermann is easily the most important. He is a master of this form of *Realismus* and is unquestionably an artist. His insane, or half insane, grotesques are convincingly real; solid creations and indisputably vivified. And Wassermann is not merely a sneering, leering Mephistopheles, like Schnitzler, for behind his bottomless miseries is a suggestion of something ultimately better, almost a mystic belief in what he might call salvation. He does not approve of his ghastly folk, though he is very sorry for them. But, though it is there, it is difficult to see much of the rainbow after his storms.

The present story is another presentation of the unhappiness of genius, exemplified in music. Daniel, the hero, is a creative artist, but also a savage. He is passionate, wholly self-centered, ruthless and contemptuous of the ordinary decencies of life. One woman after another is sacrificed to his need for stimulus; as Eleanore, the sister of his first wife, and also his mistress of the moment with the wife's consent), says of him: "The demands of his soul are always a few leagues in advance of the humanly possible." But she, and others, do their best to satisfy him. His first wife hangs herself, to leave the way clear for her sister, Eleanore, whom he then marries. Eleanore dies in childbirth. Then follows a long period of wandering before he marries the youthful Dorothea, who tires of him and turns to other lovers, thus bringing about a final smash. Ultimately Daniel turns into a wise teacher, but all his marvelous compositions have been burned by the wild lunatic woman, Philippina, who pursues him a lewd fury, through the whole story. That suggests one trouble with all such stories: one must take the ineffable genius of the hero for granted, and it is rarely convincing in contrast to his faults. Like all Wassermann's novels, this is a vastly complex story, with half a dozen sub-

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